

Senate when I say how proud I am to serve with the Babe Ruth of the Senate, ROBERT C. BYRD.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. If the Senator will withhold momentarily.

Mr. REID. I withdraw my suggestion.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair thanks the Senator.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of routine morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The distinguished acting majority leader is recognized.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I apologize for launching into my statement prior to protocol of the Senate being followed, but I was anxious to say what I had to say about the Presiding Officer. I apologize for getting a little ahead of the agenda.

Seeing no other Senator in the Chamber at this time, Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SENATOR BYRD, PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I am on my way to a meeting with Senator LOTT on the reorganization of the Senate, but I passed through the Senate Chamber en route. It is always a great thrill to come to the Chamber of the Senate, and a great privilege to be a Senator. Seeing the distinguished President pro tempore, the distinguished chairman of the Appropriations Committee, presiding, I decided to exchange a few moments of pleasantries and ask how a man of his prominence and importance could be presiding over the empty Senate.

Senator BYRD exchanged philosophical comments and referred to the people here as "auditors" of the Government of the United States. I hope that is not inappropriate, in terms of referring to people in the gallery. I know we cannot acknowledge people. I breached the rule once when Penn State won the national championship

and acknowledged the presence of the Penn State football team in the gallery. Senator BYRD, in a very gentle, kindly way reminded me of the Senate rule.

However, I think we are being audited, and the Senate of the United States has important oversight responsibilities on the Federal Government. The people of the United States are our overseers, our oversight committee of 270 million, and they are auditing here today in the Senate.

When Senator BYRD made the comments about auditors, I reflected for a moment about the profound nature of that comment because we are the servants of the people of America. Senator BYRD has delivered many, many erudite presentations, we might call them lectures, perorations on this floor, and they have been put into volumes on the history of the Senate.

I made a comment to Senator BYRD, as pleased as we are to have his talents in the Senate in the year 2001, he may have been born 2,000 years too late; that had he been a Roman senator, the heroes whom he speaks about and lionizes would have even been a greater Roman senate. The Senate is a greater Senate because of the presence of Senator BYRD who is our historian and mentor.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORZINE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

INTERNATIONAL PARENTAL KIDNAPPING

Mr. DEWINE. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss an issue that I have raised many times before, and that is the tragic problem of American children being abducted from this country and taken abroad. This international parental kidnapping is a tragic problem in our country today. One country in particular has had a really poor record of returning abducted children, and that country, amazingly, is the country of Germany. So I am raising this issue again today on the floor because our President, President Bush, will be in Europe next week to meet with German Chancellor Schroeder.

Today's Washington Post has an editorial that discusses how vitally important it is that we make international parental kidnapping a top priority. I could not agree more. Today I have written to President Bush, asking him to raise this issue of international parental kidnapping when he meets with the Chancellor. I am hopeful he will do just that.

Let me take a few minutes to update my colleagues about what is happening in our relations with Germany on this issue. As you know, the Hague Convention on the international aspects of child abduction, which the United States and Germany have both signed, is in place to facilitate the return of internationally abducted children to their countries of "habitual residence" for custody determination. That is where the issue is supposed to be adjudicated. Unfortunately, it has become clear that all countries that have signed the convention do not take their obligations seriously. Germany has performed especially poorly in returning children and allowing family visitation options.

According to the General Accounting Office, 215 Hague Convention cases seeking the return of children have been opened with Germany, just since 1995. Of those cases opened, 172 of them have been closed with the children being returned only 67 times, or 39 percent of the time, and not returned 105 times, or 61 percent of the time.

Because of this disturbing return rate, during the past year both former President Clinton and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright raised with German officials the problems with their country's poor compliance rate.

Additionally, this Senate and the House of Representatives passed a resolution I sponsored which urged the signatories—namely Germany, Austria, and Sweden—to comply with their Hague Convention obligations.

In response to these efforts, an American-German working group on child custody issues has been established. While this group has made some progress in handling future cases of child abduction, momentum seems to have slowed, and essentially no progress has been made regarding the open cases, either in the return of children to the United States or in allowing left-behind parents adequate visits with their children.

To that end, I believe we simply must not allow Germany or any signatory nation to ignore their convention obligations and turn blindly against the parents who have suffered unbelievable heartache because of the loss of their children.

Ultimately, we cannot understate nor can we ignore the importance of getting these children returned to their homes in the United States. We must make the return of all internationally abducted children a top foreign policy priority.

This is obviously not a partisan issue. Rather, this is a humanitarian issue, an ethical issue, an issue about children and how we can reunite families. I urge my colleagues to support efforts to bring these children home. Ultimately, the great tragedy is not the loss that these parents feel. The great